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# The Ratchford Experiment



One family's attack on waste

# The Garbage Problem

Since 1970, when the Ontario government first addressed the growing garbage problem in this province, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment has developed one of the world's most comprehensive programs of waste management, reclamation and disposal.

Step-by-step, Ontario has virtually eliminated open dumps, developed area plans and environmentally-sound landfill and incineration operations and advanced toward a system of reclamation of material and energy from waste.

The Ontario Centre for Resource Recovery is the world's most advanced reclamation research plant — both a separation and recovery plant and a laboratory for pioneering resource recovery methods and processes leading to

the development of markets for reclaimed material.

With this new facility, with other plants under development and with new policy initiatives, Ontario's Resource Recovery Program provides a comprehensive approach to the complete cycle of production, consumption, collection, transportation, processing and recovery.

But garbage begins in the home.

The garbage problem is not just a government problem, it's a people's problem and we all have a part to play in the solution.

Based on the experience of one family, "The Ratchford Experiment" offers suggestions on how all of us can reduce the amount of garbage we generate in our homes in several easy steps.



If we can't buy the items we need in returnable containers, we can at least separate the glass bottles and take them to a recycling depot. Waste glass is used to make new glass and can be used in paving materials, building brick, insulating materials and aerated concrete. Joan Ratchford and her children are careful to sort glass by color.

*Four pounds of garbage each day.*

*That's the contribution of every man, woman and child in this Country.*

*To collect and dispose of this garbage costs each of us roughly \$25.00 per year through taxes. But that's only part of the bill.*

*We lose the use of valuable land either permanently or on a long-term basis when we bury garbage.*

*We also waste our natural resources when we bury or incinerate material which can be reclaimed and reused.*

*What can one family do? Can a small group of people really make a significant dent in their garbage output? Are the four R's of waste management — reduce, reclaim, reuse and recycle — practical for family life on a day-to-day basis?*

*One family of five took it upon themselves to find out in a co-operative experiment with the Ministry of the Environment.*

*The Ratchfords of Scarborough,  
Ontario.*

# The Ratchfords — Waste Watchers . . .

During the spring of 1975, Joan Ratchford, homemaker and part-time university student and her husband, Jack, a solicitor with the Borough of Scarborough discussed with their three children what they could do to reduce the garbage they put out for collection and disposal.

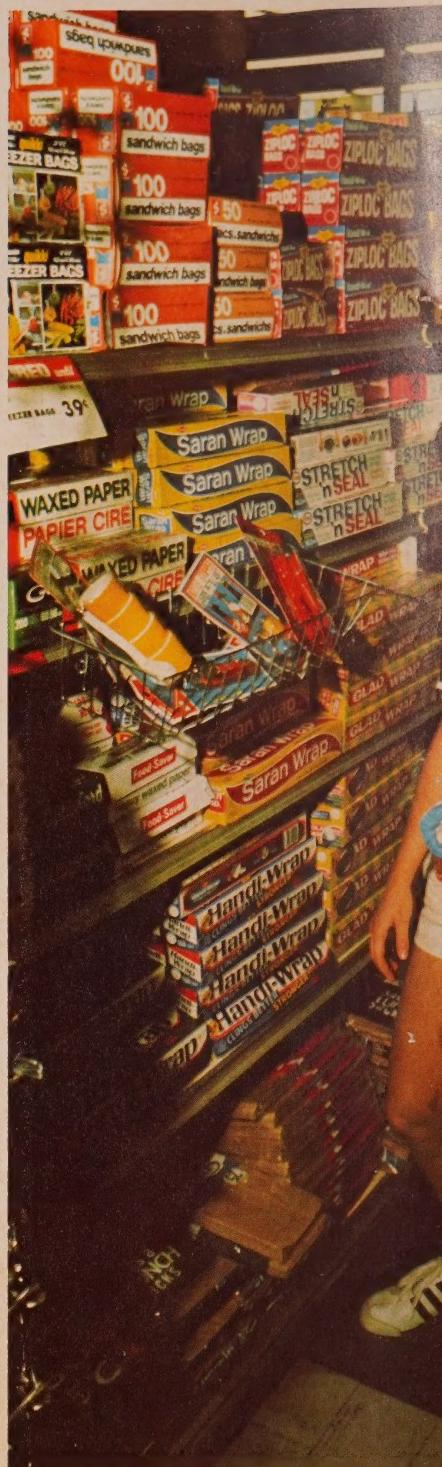
They decided there were three ways to reduce their waste production:

- By reducing the waste they bought in the form of goods in throwaway containers and excess packaging.
- By using Scarborough's municipally-operated recycling depot.
- By composting organic material for use in Jack's gardening.

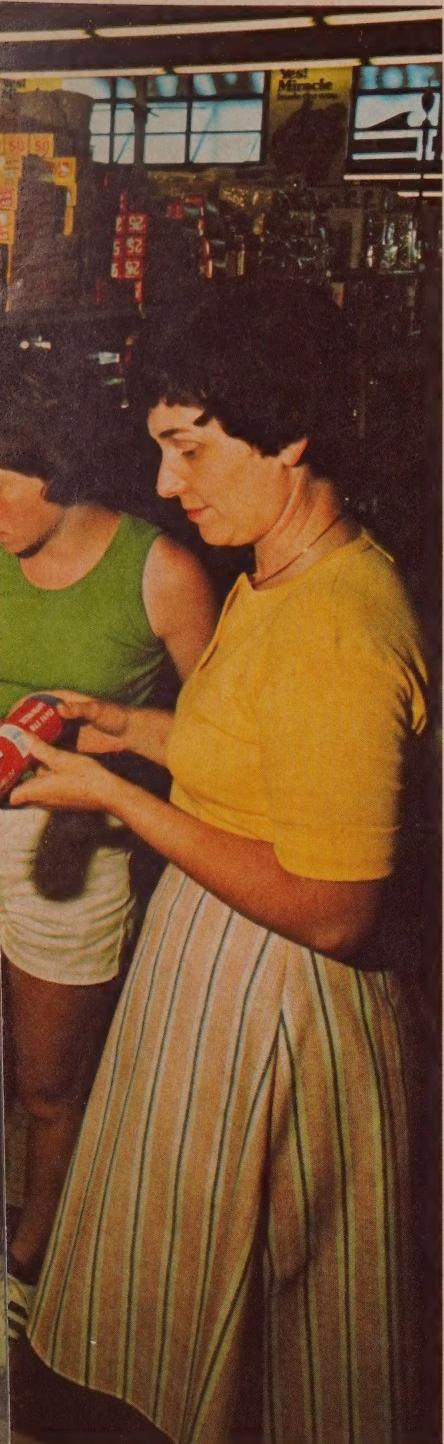
## How It Works:

For the next two months they weighed each bag of garbage as it went out to the curb and as the days went by, they were able to see that their efforts were successful.

By the end of June they had reduced their amount of curbside garbage by one-third (209 pounds) and the amount showed further indications of decreasing as the family became more and more waste conscious.



Why pay for flashy wasteful packages? Joan Ratchford and da...  
in refillable or returnable containers can reduce their garbage output.



## Careful Shopping:

"Avoiding excess packaging can save money as well as reduce garbage," Joan Ratchford reported. "I really didn't have to alter my shopping list very much at all. Many of the things I have always done to save money, such as buying milk and soft drinks in refillable containers, are also good waste-watching practices."

## Recycling:

"The boys didn't find much excitement in sorting our glass containers into colors and washing them until we took our first trip to the recycling depot. They enjoyed it so much they could hardly wait to go again." Joan continued. "I was surprised to find that after letting all of our non-returnable glass products build up for a month we had more than 49 pounds to get rid of.

"When we first decided to save the glass for recycling, I was concerned about storage, but it isn't really a problem. We just put two bushel baskets in the garbage and all the glass is put into them."

Anne, 15, was assigned the chore of weighing all garbage for the first three months and keeping newspapers separate from the rest of the household waste. The papers were put out for Scarborough's bi-weekly pick up.

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## **Composting:**

Jack gives a lot of credit to the compost bin he set up in the backyard. Between May and June more than 89 pounds of grass clippings were composted.

"I had to spend some money setting up the bin," Jack said, "but I will recover the costs using the composted material on my land. I should also have a better looking garden."

Eight-year-old John and Paul, 6, got into the habit of using the composter. Apple cores, banana peels and other food remains were dropped into it.

### **It Brings Results:**

"We made the experiment a family involvement project," Jack said.

"After all the children have a bigger stake in the quality of our environment than Joan and I have. I believe that they should learn at an early age how to protect and preserve our resources and all the other things which go into making a good healthy environment.

"We will probably stop weighing the garbage now because we have proven to ourselves that the measures we chose for reducing are very effective. But we will definitely keep on with the project. Waste watching is a very easy habit to develop, especially when you know that you are helping yourself as well as your community."



**Composting is the best way to get rid of this waste produced through their**



down of food and garden wastes into a soil conditioner. It is also the easiest way to dispose of material. Jack Ratchford shows Paul and John the fertilizer which they have made in their compost pit.

## THE RATCHFORDS HAVE JOINED THE WASTE WATCHERS

How about you?

Here are the Ratchfords' guidelines which you can follow and also add your own ideas.

### YOU CAN:

#### At Home

- set up a compost bin
- compost all wet household wastes, grass and weed clippings
- return unsolicited junk mail
- cut down on ornate gift wrapping
- use cloth wipes instead of paper towelling
- try lunch kits instead of paper bags
- use easy care fabrics instead of paper napkins and tablecloths
- stay away from disposables — paper plates, cups
- separate newspapers for collection drives or recycling depots
- take tin cans and non-returnable glass bottles to depots
- use plastic containers as refrigerator containers, flower pots and craft items
- repair broken toys and furniture

#### At the Store

- purchase milk and soft drinks in refillable bottles
- refuse extra paper or plastic bags
- avoid too many plastic containers
- avoid aerosols
- string bags are better than paper bags for carrying groceries
- buy the contents, not a fancy container or package
- pick up refills whenever possible

#### At Work or School

- assess the need for new purchases
- buy recycled products
- avoid disposables whenever possible in the cafeteria
- recycle paper, computer cards, pencils, carbons . . .



The average Ontario resident discards about four pounds of garbage per day. Here John and Paul Ratchford struggle to put out the family garbage before their reduction program got underway.

**For further information, write:**  
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**135 St. Clair Avenue West,**  
**Toronto, Ontario, M4V 1P5**



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